

1889.

NEW ZEALAND.

NAVAL AND MILITARY SETTLERS' AND VOLUNTEERS'
LAND-CLAIMS COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF THE).

Report brought up 21st August, 1889, and ordered to be printed.

THE Select Committee appointed on the 9th day of July, 1889, to consider and report upon all petitions relating to claims for grants of land by naval and military settlers and Volunteers has the honour to report as follows:—

That eighty-six petitions and many letters on similar subjects were referred to your Committee from claimants under "Naval and Military Scrip Act, 1856" (Auckland); under the various statutes affecting officers, non-commissioned officers, privates, marines, and seamen who retired from the army and navy for the purpose of settling in the Colony of New Zealand; from Jackson's Forest Rangers and the Forest Rangers enrolled subsequently to the disbanding of Jackson's Forest Rangers; from members of the Colonial Defence Force; and from Volunteers claiming under "The Volunteers' Land Act, 1865," and amending Acts. There are also many petitions held over from last session.

Your Committee carefully considered the reports of the Royal Commissions of which Colonel Haultain and Major Gudgeon were Chairmen, which show that the total number of claimants amount to nearly two thousand.

The Committee felt that it was quite impossible to examine properly into the merits of each individual case, and determined, therefore, not to inquire into the prayer of each petitioner, but to limit inquiry to the general principles which should, in its opinion, guide it in recommending the House what course should be adopted to make a final settlement of the various claims.

The Committee examined Major Gudgeon as to the nature and value of the evidence on oath which he took when Chairman of the Naval and Military and Local Forces Land-claims Commission, 1886, and also Mr. Percy Smith, Surveyor-General, on the questions of the surveys of land-grants.

With regard to claimants under "The Naval and Military Scrip Act, 1856," the Committee resolved that such persons late of Her Majesty's naval and military forces who were entitled to scrip under "The Auckland Naval and Military Scrip Act, 1856," whose claims have not been satisfied, are still entitled to a certificate for remission of £20 in the purchase of Crown lands within the Provincial District of Auckland.

With regard to the claims of naval and military settlers, the Committee had some difficulty in arriving at a conclusion. These men, on entering Her Majesty's service, undoubtedly were led to suppose that, if they retired from the service for the purpose of settling in New Zealand, they would be entitled to grants of land, and many men took their discharge with the object of securing land, unaware that subsequent to their enlistment various Provincial Acts provided that claims for land had to be made within a definite period; and, further, that residence within distinct boundaries for a defined period also was essential before the issue of a Crown grant. It appears that those conditions were not well known to most of the claimants, who, in many cases, were quite uneducated men, and did not know how to set to work to acquire the land to which they were entitled. Many, undoubtedly, were careless of those rights, and did not apply for land which they did not know how to make use of. Others were deterred from pushing their claims on account of the poor quality of the available lands near the settled districts which remained open for selection on account of their poverty, and could not, on account of the unsettled state of the Native tribes, and the difficulty of obtaining any employment, occupy lands in the remoter parts of the country. But one of the remarkable features of the case is the fact that the acquisition of land was extremely difficult; most persons applying for land had to wait until surveys were made, and Mr. Percy Smith stated in evidence that surveys took months, and, in many instances, years, to complete. Of course, the ordinary discharged soldier, unprovided with any means of subsistence but his own labour, was unable to wait while surveys were being made, and therefore joined the colonial forces, or wandered away in search of work, and, having got employment, allowed the period during which his claim should have been made to lapse.