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VILLAGE-HOMESTEAD SPECIAL-SETTLEMENT SYSTEM IN NEW ZEALAND

(REPORT ON THE), BY THE HON. W. COPLEY, M.L.C., COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS,
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PRELIMINARY.—OBJECT OF VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND.

I HAVE thought it desirable to supply, for public information, a somewhat extended account of my recent visit to New Zealand. The object of that visit was to inquire into the working of the village homestead special settlements, concerning which so many conflicting statements had been made in South Australia. As a good deal of public attention had been directed to the subject, it was deemed advisable, both by the present and immediately-preceding Governments, that authentic information should be gathered upon the matter, and therefore, at the request of my colleagues, I decided to visit New Zealand, and not merely inspect groups of settlements which might be taken as fair types of the whole, but acquaint myself also with the general circumstances by which the settlers are surrounded. That seemed to me to be essential, so as to enable one to make a fair comparison with our own conditions in this colony. Moreover, I took the opportunity to converse with the settlers, with the Government officials, and with other gentlemen who had been specially interested in the special homestead settlements. A summary of their evidence is appended to this report, and embodied with that is a statement of my own conclusions upon the matter.

EXPLANATION OF VARIOUS VILLAGE SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS.

Before proceeding with a short statement of the observations made during the trip, I may explain for the sake of clearness that in New Zealand provision is made for three special forms of settlement on small holdings. The first is designed to promote the establishment of what are called "Village Homestead Special Settlement Associations," the purpose being to allow any association of persons not fewer than twelve to select blocks of land adjacent to each other, and to hold them on perpetual lease at stated periods, with revaluation. Another form is called the "Farm Homestead Special Settlement on Perpetual Lease." These, however, call for no special comment, and are merely mentioned to prevent confusion with the principal subject of my investigations—the system which provides for village homestead special settlements. Shortly epitomizing the conditions under which lands in these special settlements were selected, it may be stated that the tenure is a perpetual lease, and the first term is for thirty years with the right of renewal for subsequent terms of twenty-one years on revaluation, the right of acquiring the freehold being, however, withheld. No charge is made for lease excepting 10s. for registration. The rental is 5 per cent. upon the capital value, which must not be less than £1 per acre. No allotment must exceed 50 acres, and married applicants are preferred to unmarried. Advances are made to the settlers as follows: £20 towards the erection of a dwelling-house, £1 5s. per acre for under-scrubbing and bush-felling, and £1 5s. per acre for burning, grassing, fencing, and other improvements. These advances are made only on areas to the extent of 20 acres—that is to say, that, whilst the holder of a smaller area might enjoy the advance in respect to all his holding, the holder of a block larger than 20 acres would not receive the concession beyond the 20-acre limit. The maximum of the advance is therefore £70. Where there is no bush or clearing the advance is limited to £20 for the erection of the house. The dwelling-house must be erected within six months of the date of selection, except in the case of bush-lands, when the erection may be delayed, but only until after the first burn; but no advances are made upon the houses until they are ready for occupation. The burn is the burning of the timber after the first clearing of the land. Interest on the advances is charged at the rate of 5 per cent. per annum, payable half-yearly, and no provision is made for repaying the principal. Each selector must live on the land (though that condition has been relaxed in a few special cases, which are mentioned later on), and within two years must cultivate 1 acre, and in four years half the remainder of his section. Permanent improvements are defined, as fencing the land with timber or other durable materials, not being a brush fence, or breaking it up and laying it down in English or other cultivated grass, or breaking