

particular inquiries from Government officials and other gentlemen competent to give evidence upon the matter, and had recourse also to official documents. The experiments in Auckland District were four times as extensive as those in any other, the number of persons who took up the land being more than half of the total for the whole of New Zealand. It appears evident that at a time when the unemployed difficulty was a pressing problem in the larger towns the village homestead special settlement system was "rushed" as a relief measure designed to disperse the unemployed into the country districts. In the hurry sufficient care was not taken in the selection, either of the locality for the settlements or of the men who were to go upon them. People who had never lived out of large towns were sent to the land without capital either of money or of experience. Amongst them were many artisans and men who had been employed in shops, as well as a large number of labourers. For the more indigent of these persons the Government paid the cost of travelling from the towns to the settlements, but a number of them never went upon the ground; and at the end of a short period after the inauguration of the system not more than half of the original settlers remained, whilst some of the balance found their way back to streets which they had left. Special efforts had to be made by the Government to give subsist employment to those who persevered with their holdings, and the expense involved in doing this formed a subject of severe parliamentary condemnation of the Government of the day. Roadworks were started upon an extensive scale, and the blockholders earned a little money by digging up kauri-gum in the adjacent forests. The following figures will give some idea of the progress of the system: On the 31st March, 1887, nine months after the first land had been taken up on special village homestead conditions, 896 persons had selected 29,000 acres all over the colony, but chiefly in Auckland, the average area held being 32 acres. The next calculation showed that many of these original holders abandoned or transferred their blocks to other persons. On the 31st March, 1888, there were 975 blockholders, the total area held being 30,100 acres. Of these, 975, more than half (496, representing, with their families, about 1,400 persons, and holding 21,430 acres) were in the Auckland Land District, the number of the settlements being nineteen. In the year and nine months which had elapsed since the inauguration of the system throughout the colony £11,673 had been advanced by the Government to the settlers under the regulations, and £10,148 had been spent by them in road-making, undertaken specially in connection with the settlements, and mostly in the Auckland District. The idea, of course, was that the roadwork, at the beginning of his enterprise, would, with his advance, enable the settler to live whilst he was clearing his block and laying it down in grass. At this time the receipts in rent and interest amounted to £789, and the arrears to £277, or more than one-third of the total. The exact proportion of the advances made in Auckland District during this period was £5,802, against which should be set the value of the improvements upon the holdings, represented by £7,557. When this return was prepared ten sections had been abandoned, the sum paid on them being £126; six had been transferred, and 143 forfeited. On the 31st March, 1889, the department had to confess that, whilst some of the favourably-situated settlements were successful, others were not—comparisons unfavourable to Auckland being made with Canterbury, where the settlements had been in great degree self-supporting almost from their inception. By this time the number of original settlers on the block had increased to 1,159, of whom, however, 614, or only slightly more than one-half, remained. There had been 275 transfers and 120 forfeitures, the land in the latter case being available for selection under other conditions, the "advance" system having now been suspended. The area held was 28,368 acres, and the total amount of advance on the land and for the houses had swollen to £19,000, the annual rent and interest combined being £2,693. The rent was now greatly in arrear. The sum of the overdue payments was £1,723—£1,394 for rent and £329 for interest. Of this £1,723 all but £400 was owing by the Auckland settlers, notwithstanding that they had received £9,232 in advances—the expenditure including the cost of practical lectures and gifts of trees—and that roadworks in the vicinity of their settlements (works started for their assistance) had involved an expenditure of £12,414. Even up to the present, I was assured, some of the blockholders had not paid any interest; but the department at Auckland states that the position of the settlements is improving with the easier means of communication, and the "sifting-out" of unpractical and useless men. The latest particulars about the Auckland settlements are contained in a return which was supplied to me at Auckland. The salient points in that document, briefly epitomized, give a sufficient review of the settlements from October, 1886, to February, 1891 (the time of my visit), but I have thought it well to include the full return in the Appendices. In February there were fifteen of these settlements, out of seventy-five in the whole colony, spread over various parts of the Auckland District. From the beginning, 650 original applicants had been accepted, and, of these, 506 took up the blocks. In some of the settlements only about half the applicants did more than have their applications accepted, and of the 506, 446 went upon the land. The number of present holders is 312, of whom 282 are actually resident. The advances which have been made amount to £9,270, and £15,397 was spent upon roadworks. The value of the improvements upon the blocks is £13,745. The arrears of rent amount to £641 10s. 6d., and the arrears of interest to £503 7s. It is explained that though the expenditure upon roads appears large, and although it was incurred directly for the benefit of the village settlers, the benefit to the adjoining Crown lands is great. The work has enhanced their value and made them accessible, "the result being," as stated by Mr. Humphries, Commissioner of Crown Lands at Auckland, "that thousands of acres have been selected on deferred payment and perpetual lease, and lands have been opened which would have remained unoccupied had it not been for the formation of the settlements and the expenses attendant upon road-making." The largest settlement is Motukaraka, where there are now thirty-six settlers, though sixty-three originally applied for the land and fifty went upon it. In some other cases only eighteen remain out of thirty-nine who applied, fifteen out of thirty-two, thirty-one out of eighty-three, twelve out of forty-seven, and twenty-five out of seventy-two, though it is only fair to add that in all these cases the proportion who actually went upon the land bore no relation to the number of those who applied to go upon it. One settlement which especially challenges attention is that at Herekino, where 125 applications for the land were accepted, 108 took up sections, ninety-nine went upon them, and only thirty-four remain. This