1894.

NEW ZEALAND.

AUCKLAND, CAMPBELL, AND OTHER ISLANDS

(REPORT ON),

AND ON THEIR SEALS AND SEAL-ROOKERIES.

Laid on the Table of the House by Leave.

Mr. JAMES P. JOYCE to the Hon. the MINISTER of MARINE.

SIR,— Invercargill, 28th May, 1894.

In a previous communication I have had the honour to furnish you with a *précis* of the interviews between Captain Fairchild, of the s.s. "Hinemoa," and the master of the Norwegian whaler "Antarctic." The objects of the "Hinemoa's" cruise were, under your instructions, in addition to warning off the foreigner, to replenish dépôts, to build boat-sheds, and to erect guide or finger-posts at as many suitable points as practicable; and, further, to gather as much information concerning the sealeries and the islands generally as possible. These have been in every instance attained, and the result will be, I hope, at an early period to bring the large natural capabilities of the islands into profitable use.

The sailing of the "Hinemoa" dates from the 25th ultimo, and her return to the Bluff was made on the 20th current. During this period, although broken weather intervened, there were ample opportunities for observation of the geographical and physical features of the several islands. As Captain Fairchild will have furnished his report of the dépôts and boats-sheds erected and examined, together with the number and localities of the guide-posts set up, I need not recapitulate here the work done.

The Auckland Islands, speaking in general terms, have but a brief geological history. They display throughout evidences of volcanic, or rather plutonic, origin. Everywhere that the rocky foundation is exposed, a series of lava beds, with seams of scoria interposed, occur, the latter evidently the calcined remains of a surface-soil similar to that which now covers the greater part of the islands. Using the term in a relative sense, the existing surface is of recent growth. Although in most places a considerable depth of peaty soil has been formed by the disintegration of the rock and the decay of vegetation, the native trees and shrubs are nowhere of an age beyond a few hundred years. There are no traces of past forests. The trees, chiefly ironwood, that fringe much of the eastern coast-line, are of small dimensions, in few instances exceeding 1ft. in diameter. Above this belt of trees and shrubbery, at an average height of, say, 250 yards, the country is open, and, for the most part, well clothed with grasses peculiar to the islands, of a stout and succulent nature, together with the New Zealand tussock, and herbage of various kinds. The whole of the country, contrary to the opinions expressed by former visitors, is adapted for pastoral purposes, although undoubtedly wet and spongy over its general surface. But this drawback would soon be diminished were the ground grazed over by sheep and cattle, whose tracks would at once consolidate the surface, and form lines of drainage. At present the sea-lions which frequent the coast-line, and go long distances inland, tend to keep the surface in a condition the reverse of favourable to rapid evaporation of the rainfall. The climate, although humid, is singularly equable. During the time of our visit it ranged between 45° and 54° Fahr. The condition of the sheep which have been landed several places and at various times by Captain Fairchild is such as to warrant the statement that for pastoral purposes the Aucklands rank high. Even if their area is not so large as hitherto estimated (114,000 acres), there would still be sufficient country to depasture at once from 20,000 to 30,000 sheep, and a fair proportion of cattle. Two sheep, of Lincoln types, taken off Rose Island and brought up by the "Hinemoa," are proof of the foregoing estimate. Their fleeces are of four or five years' growth, some of the locks reaching the length of 23½in., while the condition of the animals themselves was perfect. The ram weighed, when caught, fleece and all, fully 150lb.; the ewe (evidently born on the island, being long-tailed), between 80lb. and 90lb. That the number has not increased is due to the fact of the animals having been left unshorn. Long domestication and breeding for wool has rendered the sheep dependent, so to speak, for its existence upon man. Left unshorn for two or three years, its reproductive powers remain in abeyance. The goats placed on different parts of the islands have thriven and increased in numbers, while the pigs, although not many were seen, must be in considerable force, as their rootings were in places extensive. It is to be regretted that, on Enderby and Rose Islands, an area of 3,000 or more acres, rabbits swarm, and greatly reduce the value of the pasturage. They were introduced by one of the founders of the settlement, abandoned some forty years ago, he having been, as the introducers of the pest to

New Zealand were, ignorant of the destructive powers of the animals. Of their abundance, an idea will be formed when it is stated that one of the "Hinemoa's" party shot over twenty in the course of a short excursion. Indigenous game is by no means abundant—a few flightless ducks and small wading birds were the only kinds met with. On Adams Island, however, which is really a part of the Auckland Islands, being separated only by an exceedingly narrow passage, is the breeding-place of the albatross and other sea-birds, whose nests are placed on the highest ground. The extreme altitude of any of the land is under 2,000ft., the great bulk of it being from 100ft. to, say, 1,000ft. above the sea-level. Looked at from seaward, it is comparable to the best tracts of the east coast of New Zealand, and by some of the party likened in outline to Banks Peninsula, Provincial District of Canterbury. The area of Adams Island is estimated at 24,000 acres, and for pastoral purposes it is fully equal to the main island—in fact, the condition of the sheep seen upon it was considered superior—the fleeces being unbroken —to that of the pair taken from the northern part of the group.

Without any defined line of demarcation there is yet as complete a tribal severance between the fur seals and the sea-lions as between two nations. The west coast of the Aucklands is the habitat of the former, the eastern inlets and harbours the periodical haunts of the latter. These terms are used advisedly, for, while the sea-lion is undoubtedly a migratory animal, the fur seal, there is good reason to believe, is a permanent resident of the isolated "rookeries" that are found either in the caves or rock-walled gulches that indent the steep cliffs. This western wall is of varying height, ranging from 250ft. to perhaps 900ft., the land falling away to the eastward in more or less gradual slopes, broken in places by outcrops of bare rock or loose stones. The line of western coast, it is necessary to state, was not seen from seaward by the "Hinemoa's" party, but was viewed by Captain Fairchild and Mr. Gordon from a saddle of one of the highest hills, of which the western face is an almost sheer down cliff. It is, therefore, impossible to estimate with any degree of precision what has been the effect of the measure of protection afforded by the observance of "close seasons." That there has been poaching is well known, and there is but too much reason to fear that the number of fur seals is likely to be a continuously diminishing quantity. That they will ever be completely exterminated is not probable, some of the rookeries being exceedingly difficult of access, either from landward by means of ropes or from seaward by boat. The protection extended primarily to the fur seals has, on the other hand, operated most favourably as regards their congeners, the sea-lions. These were met with at nearly every point touched at among the Aucklands, and also at Campbell Island. At one place (Rose Island) ninety were counted on the beach, and among the scrub and tussock some hundreds of yards inland. At other places, where a landing was only effected for the purpose of setting up guide-posts, from ten to thirty were often seen on the beaches. They are, in short, fairly numerous along the extensive eastern coast-line from north to south, and this at the season of the year when their numbers are already reduced by the annual migration. In the absence of data as to the commercial value of the animals, the results of the conservation cannot be even approximately appraised, but, putting it at the low figure of £2 per head—Musgrave speaks of having tried-out as much as thirty-five gallons of oil from a single sea-lion—the temptation to poaching becomes evident. Formerly only the blubber of the sea-lion was deemed of value, but there is reason to believe that the skins could be turned to account. To set the question at rest, it would be only necessary for the Government to authorise Captain Fairchild to kill and bring over to the mainland half a dozen sea-lions, the skins of which could be tanned, and the carcases treated to the best advantage. There is certainly no sufficient reason to continuously protect the sea-lions —they simply occupy and defile considerable areas on the coast that could be utilised for pastoral purposes. There is practically no danger of their complete extermination, for, as has been said, they are migratory, and the periodical slaughter could be conducted as at the Alaskan sealeries, under proper supervision. Although the sea-lions might be driven from parts of the coast suitable for sheep or cattle, there would still be ample space for them on the numerous islets and in the least accessible bays. Regarding the habits of the seals, it may be said that their time is divided pretty equally between fishing in the sea, and sleeping, or rather dozing, on the land. Ungainly and sluggish in their movements ashore, no sooner do they enter the water than their whole structure seems to undergo an entire change. Without apparent effort they dart and dive with such arrowy swiftness that one has no difficulty in understanding how they may get their living by fishing. But their activity in this respect has rendered the finny-tribe scarce, and it would go hard with them at times if it were not for the teeming abundance of crabs of two kinds, one in shape resembling a gigantic spider, and named accordingly, the other a counterpart of the larger kind, common on the coasts of Great Britain. Of these, the sea-lion in a few dives of three or four minutes' duration can obtain enough to occupy his digestive powers till next day. It is more than suspected that he occasionally varies his diet by preying upon penguins, and other sea-birds and their eggs. Where he goes in the winter months is thus far a mystery, but that it is to some islands or shoal-waters in the further south there can be no question. Captain Fairchild considers it quite feasible to follow the sea-lions and penguins on their journey, the latter more especially going in immense flocks, and swimming at a rate of from four to five miles an hour—a pace that even during the night would enable a steamer to keep within range of them.

Campbell Islands, with an estimated area of some 20,000 acres, is of quite different geologic formation to the Aucklands. Cretaceous strata intervene between volcanic and ironstone bands. The chalk, which contains the usual nodules of flint, has been hardened by heat and pressure, but it is still structurally distinguishable. The pasturage here is excellent, and evidently capable of being rendered even more valuable. Some handfuls of rye-grass seed scattered on a burnt patch some six months ago by Captain Fairchild had come up and taken good hold of the soil. There are two excellent harbours; but less timber than on the Aucklands.

Antipodes Island has an area of, say, 4,000 acres, and is like the others, well grassed. Its formation, as seen in passing its bold shores, is chiefly sandstone, the layers of which are in places

almost as regular as courses of masonry. There are some cattle on this island, but, owing to the prevalence of fog at the time of our visit, these were not seen. Their camping places afforded proof of the beneficial influence of stock upon the texture of the peaty soil. Instead of the porous and spongy surface, a compact mould has been formed. The one drawback to the island is its lack of a harbour, there being only a landing-place for boats in fine weather.

The Bounties are a mere cluster of rocks, rising to a height of 150ft. above sea-level. They are absolutely bare of vegetation of any kind, but are in the breeding season the nesting-place of countless penguins. A more dangerous and inaccessible place can nowhere be found, although it has, at one time and another, been the resort of sealers, some of whom have lived for months on the larger islands of the group.

The distances between the several islands are: From the south-west end of Stewart Island to the Snares, sixty-two miles; from the Snares to Auckland Islands, 148 miles; from thence to Campbells, 147 miles; from Campbells to Antipodes, 406 miles; from Antipodes to Bountys, 120 miles; from Bountys to the Bluff, in a direct line, 436 miles.

As bearing upon the capabilities of cultivation of the islands, it was observed at Port Ross that white clover and cocksfoot, introduced grasses, had held their own; and here New Zealand flax, nowhere else to be met with, and probably introduced by either the Enderbys or the Maori refugees, who once were located here, flourishes in great luxuriance. The fact speaks for itself to every New Zealand settler, for it is an axiom that where flax grows strongly almost any other crop can be relied upon. While it is not likely that grain, with the exception perhaps of oats and rye, would ripen satisfactorily, there can be no doubt that the ordinary vegetables of the garden could be easily grown. Fire, and the chipping of tussock, would enable large areas to be cheaply grassed. It would be an error, however, to convey the impression that the islands are suitable for settlement on a small scale. By whomsoever they are taken up, a considerable amount of capital will have, in the first instance, to be expended. Large storage room for wool, and freezing works, would be essential features. The pastoral industry, while it would tend to the banishment of the sea-lions, would not interfere with the fur seals. On the contrary, the pastoral tenants would be their best conservators. Sealing parties usually take with them dogs, the presence of which would be to the pastoral tenants most objectionable.

Although not within the jurisdiction of New Zealand, being, in fact, an appanage of Tasmania, a report on the sealeries would be incomplete without pointed reference to the Macquarries. They are situate about 400 miles S.W. from the Auckland Islands, and are the home of the sea-elephant, sea-leopard, and, during the summer months, of countless penguins of several varieties, among them royal, Victoria, King, and rock-hopper. Some of these attain large dimensions, weighing on arriva from the south as much as 30lb., and yielding fully a gallon of oil. Their utilisation, is, however, a work of danger and difficulty, so that, from a commercial point of view, the islands, which are wholly without timber, and comparatively sterile, are next to valueless. But, lying within easy range of the Aucklands, they constitute a perpetual menace to the sealeries. Although long observation has led to the conclusion that the fur seal is never found upon them, it is, of course, possible that a herd of these animals may at any moment take up their abode there. Hence it would be easy for a poaching vessel that could prove having been at the Macquarries, if afterwards found at the Aucklands with fur sealskins on board, to account for them by declaring that they had been taken on foreign territory. In view of such a contingency, of their geographical position, and of the desirability in the interests of mariners generally of including them within the number of islands to be furnished with provision dépôts and, if necessary, periodically visited, negotiations were about three years ago entered into with the Tasmanian Government for their transfer to New Zealand. The representative branch of the Legislature cordially agreed to the proposal; but the Upper House objected, for reasons that the published correspondence fails to disclose, and the business fell through. Recent events, notably the arrival in New Zealand waters of the Norwegian whaler and sealer "Antarctic," with the avowed purpose of cruising among the islands to the south, strongly suggest the urgency of re-opening negotiations for the transfer of the Macquarries from Tasmania to New Zealand. Unless the former colony consents to this course, the continued preservation of the sealeries, which have been for years sedulously protected, and at considerable outlay, must become an exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, task.

A middle course has been suggested—namely, that, while possession of the Macquarries should remain with Tasmania, their guardianship should be delegated to New Zealand. This, of course, would involve legislation by each colony; but that, in view of the situation as it now presents itself, should not be a difficult matter.

In closing these notes of observation, I desire to express my sense of obligation to Messrs. Gordon, McBeath, Danby, and Travers, my fellow-voyagers. The two first-named gentlemen are practical sheep-farmers. Mr. McBeath is manager of Williamson Brothers' extensive stations in Poverty Bay district, North Island, and Mr. Gordon a practical pastoralist in the same district. Both gentleman have had Home experience, in colder regions than any of the southern islands. Mr. Gordon will, I understand, publish the result of his examination of the country. Mr. Travers, who was most indefatigable in his search for specimens of the avifauna of the islands, will also, I understand, communicate the result of his work to the Press of Wellington.

The Snares Islands were scarcely within the scope of my instructions, but I may be permitted to say that they are neither barren nor unsuitable for occupation. When the proposed lighthouse is erected, it will be possible to run on the two main islands, on which there is abundant firewood and grass, some 1,500 or 2,000 sheep, the produce of which will render them, so to speak, self-supporting.

Fishery here might be remunerative, but in the more southern islands not so. Those caught were infested with worms to a degree that rendered them most repulsive. Some of the crew of the Norwegian whaler made light of these parasites, asserting that they were common at certain seasons to the codfish of the northern seas—that on being sprinkled with salt the worms came to the surface and were easily removed, the fish being then cured in the ordinary manner.

The foregoing summary leaves, perhaps, some features of interest untouched. The indications of minerals at Campbell and Antipodes Islands were unmistakeable, but time did not permit of prospecting. I feel assured these are sufficient to warrant further exploration.

Finally, I have to express my deep sense of indebtedness to Captain Fairchild and his officers, and, indeed, to the steamer's crew generally, for their courtesy and for the facilities they afforded me of becoming acquainted with the natural features of the several localities visited. The work of placing guide-posts involved taking the steamer into entirely uncharted places, and demanded at every point the most untiring vigilance and experienced seamanship. Captain Fairchild's motto in regard to every matter connected with the service he was engaged in was not "Go on," but "Come on."

I have, &c.,

The Hon. J. G. Ward, Minister of Marine. JAMES P. JOYCE.

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