

At Pitt Town co-operation was still in force. The Pitt Town Block lies about thirty-four miles from Sydney, and three or four from the country town of Windsor. It is about 2,200 acres in extent. In New Zealand we should call it dry, rolling, lightly-timbered country. The soil is stiff reddish loamy clay, obviously requiring much working. It struck me as poor, and from what I could find out by many inquiries not more than a fourth of it was classed as "pretty good." Until used for a settlement it had remained a Government reserve, though the country round had been settled for generations: that alone made one suspect its quality. A hundred settlers, representing about five times as many human beings, were on it when I went there, and had been there for more than a year and a half. A good deal of work had been done in the way of clearing and the planting of maize, wheat, potatoes, melons, tomatoes, fruit-trees, &c. The block has been fenced with a log fence. The crops seemed badly in need of water.

The manager told me they had not had an inch of rain for months. Two dams had been made, one new and empty, waiting for the rain, the other full of clay-coloured water. A sawmill had been put up, but had not been found to pay. The settlers were living in lines of *whares*, each on narrow half-acre strips of land; on these more or less gardening has been done. We went into one or two of the *whares* and talked to the settlers' wives. A gang of men were stumping near at hand, and seemed working steadily enough. I went into the store of the settlement, where several applicants were waiting for their rations and grumbling because certain articles were not forthcoming; I found that the credit account of the settlement was exhausted, and stores, in consequence, not easy to get.

The board of control in Sydney had just resigned, the manager was being changed, and the settlers seemed in much doubt and discouragement.

Before giving what, in my opinion, were the causes of this trouble, I would in a few sentences describe the system under which the settlement was founded and managed. The Government, while finding the land and obtaining power from Parliament to advance money, had handed over the management to a board of trustees, resident in Sydney, consisting of philanthropic gentlemen, merchants, professional men, Civil servants, and so forth. As to their special knowledge of agriculture and the work of settlement I was unable to satisfy myself. I met the chairman, I may say, and found him an honourable gentleman, and an enthusiastic believer in village settlements. The trustees seem to have enlisted the settlers with the aid of the Labour Bureau. They then appointed a manager and issued regulations under which the settlement had to be worked. All this was done in pursuance of an Act of Parliament empowering the Government to appoint and work with such boards, and the boards to make binding regulations for settlements. Under these regulations each male adult settler in good health had to work forty-eight hours a week under the manager's direction. In return they got coupons entitling them to receive from the store before mentioned about stores enough for themselves and families to live on. This arrangement was to go on till the settlement became more than self-supporting, when it was assumed, by sales of produce, that the advances from the Government would be repaid, and profits made, which were ultimately to be divided amongst the settlers.

It must be obvious to you, even from this outline sketch, that nothing but years of hard work, patience, self-denial, and enthusiasm could enable such a settlement to succeed. But to call up such qualities in a mixed body of destitute persons certain things are needed. The settlers must have hope; and they must feel that they are free men, managing and controlling their own affairs, and not mere paupers controlled by others, and looked upon as more or less a burden on the State. I do not see how the Pitt Town settlers can feel either hopeful or very proud of their position. Though they elect a committee of advice empowered to offer recommendations to the manager, they are, in truth, entirely subject to him and to the members of the philanthropic board, who do not belong to them or to their class, and who have not much more to do with them than the members of a charitable-aid board have to do with the board's paupers.

The prospects of ultimate profit must be so remote as to count for little. So it comes to this: that all are working month after month for a low uniform weekly wage paid in kind. The least competent and idlest get this, the ablest and most industrious get no more. That would be very well if the people had sorted themselves, and could kick loafers, shirkers, and bush-lawyers out of the settlement. It might even be tolerable if the manager could or would do this. But the Pitt Town manager explained to me that he had not been in this particular properly backed by the board. As he was about to be dispensed with, and, indeed, received notice on the day of my visit, I took what he said with caution. But, so far as I could check what he told me, it was supported by other evidence. This was the third change of management since the place had been started. As though that was not bad enough, the error had been committed of keeping on one of the deposed managers as a subordinate. I was not, therefore, surprised to hear that two factions existed amongst the settlers, one favourable to the earlier manager, the other to the later. The first of these divisions wished to continue the co-operative principle; the second, and much the larger, wished to individualise their interests and subdivide the block.

Disappointing as in many respects Pitt Town was, I do not look upon it as a proof that co-operative settlement need always be a failure. Would you expect five hundred poverty-stricken human beings, even if the breadwinners were skilled cultivators, to do well on something over 2,000 acres of medium-to-bad land? Would you expect their holdings to look well in their second year after months of dry baking weather? Would any practical farmer count upon good results from an estate controlled by a board of amateur philanthropists living thirty-four miles away in a town? Is it surprising, then, that the unskilled poverty-stricken Pitt Town settlers had become discouraged and quarrelsome? As if purposely to lead to bickering, their half-acre lots were laid out in such narrow strips that there could be no privacy or isolation, and gossiping among the women and wrangling were sure to ensue. In spite of all this, much good work had been done, and the settlers to whom I spoke did not want to leave if things could be paid up fairly for them.