

*Co-operative Stores.*

23. The establishment of co-operative stores in centres such as Northcliffe and Denmark is of great importance, and, in my opinion, high prices are charged for all the necessities of life. Further, many of the settlers, now able to obtain credit for the first time in their lives (the storekeepers having a lien on the sustenance payments), are apt to run up bills recklessly. Some are quite unable to order stores a month ahead in reasonable quantities, as they have been accustomed in the United Kingdom to purchase small quantities from hand to mouth, and they find themselves overstocked. A co-operative store, not existing primarily for profit, might help to remedy this. The difficulty is to secure the necessary capital to inaugurate such a store. If this could be found, the settlers would be encouraged to take up shares by instalments, and the people who originally supplied the capital would, given good management, gradually recoup the whole of their outlay. Meantime they would have an investment on the basis, say, of 5 per cent. or 6 per cent. interest, any balance of profit being returnable to the settlers in proportion to their purchases.

*Minor Grievances.*

24. Other minor matters requiring adjustment are as follows:—

(a) Stores for the Northcliffe and Jarnadup groups are frequently pilfered on the railway between Jarnadup and Pemberton, which is an old timber line, and has not yet been taken over by the Western Australian Railway Department, though trains are running. I have asked the Government to provide a temporary lock-up.

(b) Notwithstanding our arrangement in regard to free fares for all settlers, the group settlers are not getting free fares from the port of disembarkation to the groups. They have to pay (or, rather, refund) half fares.

(c) The settlers, especially those with large families, complain of the high rate of ocean fare charged prior to the 1st May, 1925, and ask that all fares may be adjusted to those now in operation.

(d) The water-supply at Northcliffe is susceptible of improvement. The area is swampy, and, as a general rule, the usual 1,000-gallon tanks have not been provided. Some wells have been sunk, but the settlers rely largely on small streams containing water of a brownish unappetizing colour. The doctor has no evidence that the water is injurious, and he has instructed the settlers how to clear it. But many of the settlers consider that the water affects their health, and they will be much happier when they get their cottages and tanks and can collect their own rain-water supplies.

(e) The accounts for small disbursements made by the Department on behalf of the settlers, fares to the market, carriage of stores, &c., are not always promptly rendered by the district officers. The settlers complain about this, and say they do not know how much of their sustenance is coming to them on each pay-day. The Accountant of the Department promised to do his best to regularize this matter.

(f) Many settlers complain that for prolonged periods the shacks were not equipped with floorboards. This has since been rectified, but I think it very important that, in future, floorboards should always be provided at a very early date.

*Percentage of Failures.*

25. Of the 1,911 assisted settlers to whom blocks have been allotted, 621, or 32·5 per cent., have left or have been dismissed. Of the 175 full-paying British settlers, 71, or 40·6 per cent., have left or been dismissed. Of the 482 British settlers who migrated before the agreement, 210, or 43·6 per cent., have left or been dismissed. Of the 1,105 Australians, 498, or 45 per cent., have left or been dismissed. There has thus been a substantially smaller percentage of failure amongst assisted migrants under the agreement than of any other class, and failure has been the greatest amongst Australians. To some extent this may be due to the fact that Australians may be more easily able to secure alternative employment than migrants, through their friends or relatives or otherwise.

I consider that a higher percentage of failure is inevitable in the earlier stages than in the later stages of a large settlement scheme. In the earlier stages the privations may be severe, the administration may be inexperienced, schools and hospitals may not be erected, the local residents may be somewhat critical or even hostile. Last, but not least, there are no contented settlers on hand who have made good and can relate their experiences.

It is no doubt difficult, if not impossible, to select settlers in England who are in all respects temperamentally suitable for the comparative isolation of bush life. Yet temperament is the most important factor, after good physique and character. Some men and some women cannot settle down without the glamour and facilities of urban life. Others cannot eliminate the wage-earning feeling, and cannot face the world as independent tillers of the soil dependent solely on their own initiative, and these are tempted away by apparently higher wages on the roads (15s. a day), regardless of the fact that out of such wages they must pay for rent, firewood, vegetables, and the like. Some fall ill, and theirs is the worst plight. If injured on duty they receive liberal compensation, but if ill they sometimes get completely stranded, and become a charge on charitable institutions. The Ugly Men's Association and the Women's Immigration Committee do what they can to provide alternative employment, but they do not necessarily hear of every case. But there is less chance of a breakdown in health in the climate of Western Australia than there is in Great Britain, and ill health is one of the risks of life which is present in every part of the world. The only additional disadvantages which migrants have to face is that they are separated from friends in the Old Country who might be able to help them.