

Gold diggers.

The persons who are loudest in demand for the land, it should be observed, are not the gold diggers permanently and solely employed in digging, many of whom doubtless have an aversion for every other pursuit. Still, among the demandants are numbers of as genuine and probably even more useful members of their class. For the great Clutha River—being chiefly fed by the large Lakes Wakatipu, Wanaka, and Haura, and these by the melted snows from the Western Alps—sweeps along at all times like a torrent, but is most swollen and rapid in summer, and sinks to its lowest level in winter. The banks on either side, throughout much of its course through the Dunstan and Mount Benger Gold Fields, are turned up by diggings. These diggings consequently can only be worked in winter, being covered in summer by the stream. The diggers, then, thrown out of work in this way during the summer, form the first class of persons wanting land for settlement, in order that their time may be occupied when they are excluded from their diggings. Cattle-keeping seems to be established with the gold digger as the pursuit next in favour to his ordinary one of mining. But as occasional variations in the level of the river expose for working some of the diggings along its banks, the diggers who claim them wish to be always at hand and ready to resume their work. It follows that the lands they wish to cultivate or rear stock upon must be near their claims, in order that both pursuits may be carried on together. Many of these diggers are settled on the large Tuapeka Reserve, and with these the want is not only larger areas for farming, but chiefly additional room for the cattle already raised and their increase. There is no doubt that these are a very valuable class of settlers (though, it will be urged, not more valuable than many or most of the old settlers exclusively engaged in farming), and that it is desirable, if it can justly be done, to afford them every inducement to remain in the country.

Town residents.

The second class of settlers who are agitating for land, and with by far the greatest organization and perseverance, are the occupants of the gold fields towns. Of these, Lawrence, Roxburgh, and Queenstown are the most important, and begin to assume the appearance of ordinary permanent towns, the first especially having some large and expensive buildings of brick and stone. But the rest might be described as small blue villages of corrugated iron, or the flimsiest wooden buildings, packed together in streets, like the booths at a fair, with an enormous percentage of so-called hotels, the chief portion of the fronts of all the houses consisting of a mere framework covered with boards, or even painted canvas, with the names of the hotels and storekeepers inscribed upon them in flaming capitals. These sufficiently indicate the fleeting and temporary character of the collection of dwellings forming the latter towns; but no doubt they contain the nucleus of future permanent settlements. Meanwhile, the number of hotels shut up or deserted show that the palmy days of gold digging have gone by. It is no doubt in consequence of the diminution in the produce of the gold fields, and of the population employed upon them, that many of the storekeepers, butchers, bakers, and others of various occupations and callings, are now so anxious to engage in farming or stock-keeping. This they very naturally desire to do to eke out a subsistence in conjunction with their regular pursuits, which, under the circumstances, are much less remunerative, and leave much of their time unoccupied.

Now of course all the latter class, as well as most of the former, while they want land, want it also so near to the towns they live in, as to enable them to carry on two pursuits at the same time.

(c.) *Lands acquired by Government for these Settlers.*

The next question is, what lands have been kept or thrown open for the Government for occupation, agricultural or pastoral, by these gold-diggers or settlers in gold towns? In the first place, there are some very large blocks which either have been acquired by Government from runholders or never licensed or leased to them at all. These blocks are available for agricultural leases, and the unleased portions for commonage for the lessees and others. With respect to the management of one of these (the Tuapeka Reserve), a great abuse appears to exist, which it will be advisable to treat as a separate complaint. At the date of the present inquiry, the blocks of both kinds above specified were the following:—