

time the difficulties of carriage between Palmerston and Feilding, a distance of twelve miles, were very great, the way being through a bush road for eight miles, the metalling of which was not then complete, and the rest of the distance being through a Maori reserve, over hills and gullies, without any semblance of a road; and Palmerston being a comparatively new settlement, the hire of teams was difficult and very expensive.

The first few days' experience of these immigrants on the block sufficed to show two things very clearly—first, that it was necessary to house them, as the majority were utterly helpless to provide shelter for themselves, and, having large families to support, required to be put to profitable work at once; and second, that they must be concentrated while educating themselves to the novelties of their position, and while the lands they were intended afterwards to occupy were being made accessible by roads.

Arrangements were therefore immediately made by me for erecting small two-roomed cottages, to be let to the immigrants at a rental of 7s. per week, the payment of which for three years was to give them the freehold of the cottage and an acre of town land on which it was built. Every available pair of sawyers was thereupon put into requisition; arrangements were made for the erection of a steam saw-mill at Feilding, and for the first twenty cottages the timber was carted from Palmerston and Bull's, at considerable expense, before the winter set in.

Spite of every exertion, however, the house-building could not be made to keep pace with the influx of the immigrants, who, on their arrival, had for a time to be put under bell tents, and small huts of timber loosely tacked together.

The difficulties of the winter of 1874 can only be appreciated by those who had the responsibility of overcoming them. Although every possible effort was made to hasten the house-building, its progress was unavoidably slow, and the season being an unusually wet one the discomfort to large families of living in tents and huts, without fireplaces, was very great, and many of them remained in Palmerston, or removed elsewhere.

To add to all the natural difficulties at this time, the Natives resident at Awahuri stopped all traffic on the road from Palmerston to Feilding, and I suddenly found the new settlement cut off from its usual source of supply *via* Palmerston, where I had at that time over £1,000 worth of supplies collected. As the population of the settlement numbered fully 600 souls, this was a very serious difficulty; and I had immediately to organize, at very heavy additional expense, an entirely new commissariat supply from the opposite direction for the two months during which the blockade lasted.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks the settlement of the block proceeded rapidly. What with house-building, road-making, and the railway formation undertaken by the Corporation, and the work supplied by private persons coming in to settle on the block, work was abundant and wages very high. Our immigrants were, as a rule, employed by contract at prices by which experienced hands could earn very high wages. The newly-arrived immigrants were, however, most of them, very dissatisfied, especially those on bush-work; and it was only by the introduction of a number of colonial workmen among them that they could be convinced that the prices given them were not only fair but liberal.

During the year 1874 no less a number than 570 immigrants were sent out to the settlement, and it was not until the month of May, 1875, that I was able to place the newly-arrived immigrants at once in their cottages.

At this time (May, 1875) the resident population of Feilding and its immediate neighbourhood numbered upwards of 800; and although, in all other respects a very marked improvement had taken place, the settlement was still completely isolated, there being no decent road into the block. With the heavy traffic upon it, the track across the Maori reserves had become almost impassable, the flats were axle-deep in mud, the hillsides steep and slippery, and the creeks would have been completely impassable had I not put temporary bridges over them. The contract price of carriage over that four miles was 30s. per ton in summer and £2 10s. in winter, and in the winter it was difficult to get the carting done even at that price. The Native owners of the reserves through which this track passed constantly threatened to shut it up entirely. They imposed a heavy toll on horsemen and vehicles, which we had to pay. For two years I implored the Native Office, in vain, to secure us a right of road, and the track was only kept open and a permanent road line granted to me by the Natives on my engaging, on behalf of the Corporation, to make and metal the road line through their property. I had to agree to this as there was no hope of the railway line being completed before another winter, and accordingly I constructed the road during the summer of 1875-76, at a cost to the Corporation of £1,759 5s. 11d.

While referring to this Native difficulty, I may observe that a similar obstruction now presents itself at the other extremity of the block. The Makino Road (*vide* map), from Feilding to Marton, has been formed from Feilding for a distance of fourteen miles, till it meets a Native reserve lying along the Rangitikei River, which is about a mile and a half through. Of the fourteen miles of the Makino Road, eight miles are now metalled, and the remainder, as well as the four miles of the Stanway Road, which opens the Town of Halcombe, will be completed during the coming summer. Over the Rangitikei River, on the other side of the Native reserve, a bridge is being erected by the Government, at the cost of £7,000, which will also be completed during the approaching summer. From this bridge good metalled roads extend to Marton and to other parts of the Rangitikei District; thus, by the end of the coming summer there will be complete communication, by the most direct route, between Marton and all the Upper Rangitikei District on the one side, and Feilding and Halcombe on the other side, with the exception of this wretched mile and a half of Maori reserve, which is at present an absolutely impassable barrier to any traffic. On the 18th May, 1875, I wrote to the Native Minister on the subject (Appendix G), and a surveyor was sent to lay off a road line, but the Natives dispute the right, and even when the Natives are dealt with, unless the Government will construct this piece of road, it will remain undone; the funds of the Road Boards are insufficient, as are those of the County also; and the Corporation has already been so freely bled for Native roads and highways outside its boundaries, that it can hardly be expected to spend another £1,000 to open this Native reserve also.

At my urgent request but very few immigrants were sent from England during the year 1875. I was anxious to get breathing time to consolidate the settlement at Feilding, and to avoid at the new