

reconciling all their discrepancies, and educing from them a perfectly clear narrative respecting all the shipments of potatoes which might conceivably be concerned in the statement under consideration, is a task which would be probably impossible and certainly useless. We shall therefore state briefly our conclusion upon the subject, concerning which we think there can be no reasonable doubt. There is sufficient evidence to establish the following points:—

*Conclusion as to Statement about Potatoes.*—That the potato crop at the settlement in the spring of 1875 failed from the rotting of the potatoes by reason of the wet season; that application was made for a fresh supply of seed; that the letter containing the application miscarried, and it was consequently not until January, 1876, that any steps were taken to supply the want; that potatoes were then bought wherever they could be obtained, and of whatever quality, the price given being, at all events for some of them, 3d. per bag, besides 1s. the price of the bag; that these potatoes were carefully picked over, and the bad ones rejected; that some which were taken to the “Waipara” for shipment to Jackson’s Bay were refused by Mr. Bonar, on account of their bad quality, and were left on the wharf; and that the potatoes sent to the Bay were of fair quality for seed, and were sold at £10 per ton, being an advance of 8s. on the cost price, to cover the charges at the Bay. The evidence of all this is quite clear and beyond cavil, and these circumstances, together with some others, which in respect of time and place are not quite so definitely stated, will sufficiently account for the story about the potatoes as represented to Mr. Barff, and by him communicated to Parliament. First, the failure of the crop at Jackson’s Bay in 1875 might very easily lead some one to suggest that the seed was bad, and such a suggestion would doubtless find ready belief at Hokitika. The evidence of Mr. Polson would, taken by itself, favour the notion that the seed potatoes which failed in 1875 were the bad lot supposed to have been bought for 6d. per bag. But Mr. Polson’s recollection upon this subject is convicted of inaccuracy by a comparison of dates and circumstances, and by the positive evidence respecting the seed potatoes which failed, the quality of which is shown to have been good, and the price £10 10s. per ton. But the knowledge that the crop had failed, together with the subsequent facts that potatoes were bought up for the Bay at 3d. per bag (exclusive of the bags), that rotten potatoes intended for the Bay had been seen lying on the wharf, and that the attention of the Inspector of Nuisances had been drawn to them (or to some others, for this point is not quite clear), will sufficiently account for the common talk upon the subject which is proved to have been current at or about that time; and this view is further established by the fact that no complaint has come from the Bay itself about this shipment of rotten potatoes, although one or two persons have stated that some of the potatoes they bought, as well as of other stores, were bad. It is only Hokitika people who knew anything of the matter. Mr. Barff’s statement therefore about these potatoes is evidently founded upon a belief plausibly enough derived from facts of which he, as well as others, had an incomplete knowledge. Mr. Barff would scarcely have committed himself to a statement so entirely erroneous in substance, if he had known that the potatoes bought indiscriminately at 1s. 3d. per bag had been reduced by picking from eighty-one bags to twenty-nine; that others bought at 1s. 6d. per bag, and not picked over, were refused by the shippers; and that the potatoes sent to the Bay on that occasion were sold at a price barely above their cost; and, lastly, that there is no evidence whatever of any shipment of rotten or worthless potatoes having been sent to the Bay and received there.

*Hon. Captain Fraser.*—The remarks made by the Hon. Captain Fraser in the Legislative Council on the 29th August, 1878 (*Hansard*, 1878, vol. xxviii., p. 588) are equally strong with those made in the House of Representatives, but the matters referred to in them will be more conveniently dealt with under appropriate headings in different parts of this report. We communicated with Captain Fraser, requesting information on the matters referred to in his speech, and to this communication he replied, to the effect that the charges against the Resident Agent were of oppression and maintenance of truck, together with some fresh and serious charges lately shown by him (Captain Fraser) to the Attorney-General, and posted to us, and that we could obtain much light from Mr. Murdoch, “an intelligent settler, who should have been a member of the County Council.”

The intelligence of Mr. Murdoch we have had some opportunity of appreciating in the course of our inquiry, and we shall endeavour to exhibit in this report all the light which we have been able to obtain from him, but we have not considered the question whether he ought to have been a member of the County Council. The reference to this subject seems to be connected with the documents shown to the Hon. the Attorney-General, and forwarded to us, which contain the “serious charges” against the Resident Agent, referred to in Captain Fraser’s telegram. These charges are contained in a letter signed by four persons, of whom Mr. Murdoch is one, and a petition on behalf of Mr. Murdoch, calling in question the last county election for the Jackson’s Bay Riding, which resulted in his defeat.

All that we have to say upon the subject of this petition is that Mr. Macfarlane, the Resident Agent at Jackson’s Bay, was the Resident Magistrate whose duty was to hear the petition, but, since he had himself acted as Returning Officer at the election, he could not do so. He therefore adjourned the hearing until the matter could be put before the Government, and immediately upon this being done one of ourselves was appointed a Resident Magistrate for the purpose of hearing this matter, but before our arrival at the Bay the petition was withdrawn. We have not therefore concerned ourselves with the statements made in it; but, since it has been officially sent to us, and finds its place amongst the papers appended to our report, we think it right to say that, inasmuch as its allegations have not been made the subject of any inquiry, no weight ought to be attached or credence given to any of them. There are special reasons for this caution in the present case. The petition is signed by three persons, of whom two are John Murdoch and Bartholomew Docherty. These are the two framers of the petition sent to Mr. Barff, the result of our inquiry into which has already been fully set forth, and our opinion is that no charges of any kind or against any person made by the persons who framed the petition ought to be deemed worthy of the smallest credit until proved by proper evidence.

*Letter from Murdoch and Others to the Hon. Captain Fraser, 14th December, 1878.*—The letter above referred to contains little but what is repeated over and over again in Mr. Murdoch’s statements made before the Commission, but it may be noted, as a specimen of Mr. Murdoch’s style of bringing