

## CENTRAL OTAGO AND CULTIVATION OF THE GRAPE.

THE Otago Central has a beautiful climate and the requisite conditions for the cultivation of the vine." This is the opinion of Signor BRAGATO, viticulturist to the Victorian Government, who, after a journey through this province, in company with Mr J. C. BLACKMORE, pomologist to the New Zealand Government, has freely expressed his views to the reporter of the *Otago Daily Times* on the question of fruit culture. The Government are to be commended for inviting this expert to New Zealand "with a view to inspecting parts of the Colony thought to be suitable for the cultivation of the vine." It cannot be denied, except by those who, for party purposes, would almost deny the sun shines, that the present Government have honestly laboured and are zealously endeavouring to place the people on the land. The great noise which is made by a virulently garrulous impecable Opposition about supposed failure in one or two small instances only shows that the corns of land monopolists are touched, and that the policy of breaking up large estates for settlement is succeeding. Provided the people—the young people especially—are helped to settle on the land we care not what Government offers facilities. That Government is best, whatever name it receives, which promotes the real prosperity of the Colony by developing its resources and fostering self-reliance in the people. We note with greatest satisfaction, therefore, the coming of an expert to teach, in conjunction with our own capable colonists, how our country can be materially advanced. Signor BRAGATO has made one visit to the Otago Central. Before giving his report he will later on make another and extended visit, giving lectures in Clyde and Roxburgh, and perhaps other centres. Mr BLACKMORE stated to the *Times* interviewer that

in accordance with instructions, he met Mr Bragato at the Bluff on the 19th inst. and proceeded to Invercargill and thence through Central Otago. Mr Bragato visited Queenstown and the surrounding districts, also all the land in the vicinity of Arrowtown. From Arrowtown they proceeded over the Crown Range to Pembroke Lake Wanaka, and after visiting all the country surrounding the lake, proceeded by Queensbury to Cromwell. From Cromwell they passed on to Clyde and through the Waikeri Valley, and examined all the numerous valleys and foothills along the Dunstn Range for some considerable distance. After examining the whole of the country in the neighbourhood of the Dunstn Flat, they went across the river to Fraser's Flat and inspected the surrounding country, after which they went to Conroy's Gully and came out at Bald Hill Flat. Having gone through the country between that and Roxburgh they passed on to Coal Creek Flat, Roxburgh, and through the country intervening as far as Moa Flat, thence to Lawrence, where the train was taken to Dunedin.

This was evidently far from being a Max-O'Rellian visit. At every step the Victorian expert had the knowledge of the New Zealand expert to guide him in forming conclusions. The conclusions as to the character of climate and land for viticulture may be expressed in three words, "suitable," "exceptionally suitable." The country about Queenstown he found "eminently suitable for the cultivation of fruit, especially stone fruit." His hint about the manufacture of prunes and dried plums should not be forgotten. "He had never seen a more suitable country for the cultivation of the walnut, which, if undertaken, would be highly remunerative." As to the vine in the same district, and even in the neighbourhood of Wanaka, Signor BRAGATO is not so sanguine. "Possibly" is not a strong or encouraging word. Speaking, however, of the country "from Queensbury to Roxburgh, including Bannockburn, Cromwell, Clyde and surrounding districts," the Victorian expert says that the climatic conditions and the nature of the soil are "eminently favourable for the cultivation of the vine for wine making and distillation purposes"—"the enormous amount of country surrounding Clyde, Conroy's Gully and Roxburgh, is *exceptionally suitable* for the extensive culture of the grape, that is, that it may be planted by the tens of thousands of acres." We cannot help recalling to mind the many occasions on which we have heard Bishop MORAN, who, at various seasons, visited every corner of the province, express his strong opinion that Otago Central was able to carry a large population devoted to the fruit industry and even the cultivation of the vine. The opinion of his Lordship, who was regarded by many as over-enthusiastic, is now confirmed by experts. Signor BRAGATO thinks that Otago Central, if properly handled, "would employ an enormous population and improve greatly the value of the

land." He gives figures showing approximately the cost of planting and keeping the vineyards.

'At the end of five years, when the vines are in full bearing, the value of the land would be at least £100 per acre. An acre of grapes should give a return of £15 to £20 profit. The original cost of preparation and planting the vineyard up to the time it comes into full bearing would be about £8 per acre, and after that the cost of pruning and cultivation would be £2 10s per acre.'

No difficulty on the score of irrigation is apprehended, on the contrary, by the erection of a weir across the great Otago river and by other simple means, "the waters of the Molyneux, as fertilising as those of the Nile," can be readily utilised. The "construction of reservoirs in the large gullies" is also mentioned as practicable. What Signor BRAGATO and Mr BLACKMORE assert of Central Otago can be doubtless predicated of Akaroa, Nelson, and very many places in the North Island. There is a fine vineyard in Meanee, near Napier, producing grapes from which a rich strong-bodied wine is annually made. We have always wondered why Auckland enterprise did not find outlet in extensive culture of the vine and sub-tropical fruits which are imported so largely from Australia and the islands. What is said of Otago Central holds good, *mutatis mutandis*, of many districts of the North and South Islands. The great difficulty in the way of fruit cultivation is the expense of transport. It is a crying shame and a reproach to the short-sighted policy of otherwise shrewd Otagoans that white fruit growers of Central Otago give delicious apples and pears and peaches to feed their swine, Tasmania, with large prices, really commands the Dunedin market. We have heard the epithet "political idiots" applied to advocates of a certain Government. What are we to call those who have injured Dunedin and Otago by their suicidal policy? Our Members, with a united people at their back, should in a body, irrespective of party, vote solidly for the opening up of the Otago Central and the development of a highly desirable industry. Our Members should have a larger provincial spirit and less of the miserable narrowness begot of striving to please Tom, Dick, or Harry in their constituency. The Otago Central Railway should be pushed on. The Otago Central Railway will be pushed on if Members, thoroughly in earnest, form a united phalanx to secure what will, it is now seen, be of material advantage. We have little doubt that the Government which shows anxiety to help on the fruit industry, will in the future, render railway carriage less expensive. Giving school children cheap trips on the railways has educational and recreative value, but cheap transport of our products to the seaboard will commend itself more to all sensible men. Signor BRAGATO and Mr BLACKMORE are to return to Otago. Their return visit will increase the enthusiasm now happily created. In view of the importance of the matter, we suggest that the second visit of the Victorian and New Zealand fruit experts be made in company of the Premier and Minister of Lands. Mr SEDDON has travelled much in the North Island and the northern districts of the South Island. An extended visit of the Hon Mr SEDDON and the Hon Mr MCKENZIE to the country districts of Otago would give satisfaction to the people and be highly advantageous to the Colony.

A RETREAT in preparation for the Feast of Saint Patrick will begin in Dunedin on next Sunday. The order of services will be announced at the various Masses. The forty hours exposition will begin at St Joseph's on Friday, 15th inst.

THE Most Rev Dr Moran, who has taken full advantage of the fine weather to drive frequently in the country about Dunedin, confidently expects to be able to gratify his great wish to be present at the Saint Patrick's Day celebration on Friday evening, March 15, at the Garrison Hall.

HIS Grace Archbishop Redwood left Christchurch this (Wednesday) morning, in company with His Lordship Bishop Grimes to pay a visit to the Bishop of Dunedin.

AT St Mary's Church yesterday (says the *Nelson Mail* of February 18), the Very Rev Father Mahony announced to the congregation that the Rev Father Broussard, who was for some years stationer in the Wangarei district, had been recently appointed by His Grace, Archbishop Redwood, as curate for the Nelson parish and the surrounding districts. Father Broussard, like his predecessor, the late Father Landau, is a native of Brittany, and he was confident that they would find him a pious and devoted to the calls of duty as their late lamented friend.

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