

# RUSSIAN IMMIGRANTS.

## AN EYE DISEASE.

### MEN LEAVE RICHMOND MAIN.

Considerable uneasiness has been caused in the neighbourhood of Richmond Main in consequence of an eye disease among the Russian workmen employed in the development work at Richmond Main Colliery.

They were examined by Dr. H. H. Field-Martell, of Kurri Kurri, during the week, and have since left the locality. Some of the unfortunate men presented a pitiful sight, but no information can be gleaned from Dr. Martell, who absolutely declined to discuss the matter. The Russians are said to be leaving for various localities, and if this be true it would appear that a very serious obligation rests upon the Department of Public Health to institute a searching inquiry, with a view, should the necessity arise, to enforcing quarantine regulations.

One of the Russians was in Maitland yesterday. He is a strong, healthy man, and in broken English protested against the treatment being meted out to his compatriots. He explained that several of them were suffering from a very bad eye disorder which was common in his own country, and that a few were suffering with another trouble that was prevalent in all port towns. He did not think that one disease was in any way associated with the other. It was his intention to make for Sydney, to bring his own case under the notice of his consul.

A Kurri Kurri medical man, speaking of the disease yesterday, said it was not infectious in the open air, but it was dangerous in camps and houses. He would not go any further into the matter.

Dr. Field-Martell was quarantine medical officer at Thursday Island when the Russians were examined there, and several of them recognised him when he went to their camp at Richmond Main.

It is stated that the tents, etc., used by the Russians at Richmond Main have been destroyed by fire for sanitary reasons.

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live on the board of health, when seen last evening said that he knew nothing of the matter. The subject had not been referred to at the meeting of the board in Sydney on Tuesday. He thought, however, that if the disease was a serious one, it should have been at once reported to the medical authority on the board, so that the proper steps could have been taken for the segregation of the patients to prevent the disease from spreading. He would be present at the meeting of the board on Tuesday next, and if the matter was not officially referred to, he would himself bring it before the members of the board.

Mr. Louis Brodsky, of Newcomen-street, Newcastle, who acted as interpreter for the Russians, and otherwise befriended them on their introduction to the Maitland district, was spoken to last evening respecting his compatriots. Mr. Brodsky said he first heard of their discharge from Mr. John Brown's new colliery at Richmond Main from the men themselves on Wednesday morning. Twenty-one of the discharged Russian employees arrived in Newcastle on Wednesday morning, and they at once sought out their former benefactor. They told him that they had been dismissed, but did not know the reason why. They mentioned, however, that a couple of men were suffering from sore eyes, but did not state that their dismissal was associated with that fact. They said that a doctor had examined their eyes, and they afterwards were told that their services would be dispensed with. Mr. Brodsky declined to accede to the men's request to interview Mr. John Brown, for reasons as to their dismissal, and for reinstatement, and told them that Mr. Brown knew what he was doing without any interference from him. A number of men took the steamer to Sydney on Wednesday night, and the others remained in Newcastle during Thursday, and visited the steel works in search of employment. Not being successful, they also took passage by the Sydney boat on Thursday night, so that it is probable that the whole of the men are now in Sydney. Before leaving, the Russians informed Mr. Brodsky that it was the intention of the majority of them to return to their native land as early as possible. The men during the eight or nine months they had been employed in the South Maitland district

eight or nine months they were employed in the South Maitland district had lived frugally, and had each saved between £50 and £60, so that they had enough money to take them back to Russia. They said they were not discontented with Australia, but felt strange owing to their very limited knowledge of the English language, and outside of their own coterie they felt to some extent isolated. Mr. Brodsky was of opinion that some of the men would very likely seek employment at Port Pirie, though others would probably take the first available steamer for Russia. As regarded the malignant eye disease which it was reported the men were suffering from, if it was trachoma then it was serious indeed, and Mr. Brodsky said that from his personal knowledge of the disease he could quite understand the reason for their discharge. The men whom he saw, however, did not appear to have the disease in an advanced stage, and in fact, he only noticed two or three with sore eyes at all. Trachoma was a prevalent disease in Russia, and one that the medical authorities took extreme care with, especially in regard to emigrants from the country. Owing to the contagious nature of the disease American countries had absolutely refused to allow immigrants suffering from it to come within their borders, and every precaution was taken by the immigration officers to guard against any of them getting through. In Russia examinations of the strictest character were made by the Russian Colonisation and Emigration Bureau. Before intending emigrants were allowed to leave Russia their eyes were subjected to a thorough examination by eye specialists for any traces of trachoma, and their heads were scrutinised to see if they were suffering from scurvy. Especial attention was given to these diseases, and if any intended emigrant was so suffering an emigration certificate or pass was refused. The patient was then placed under proper medical treatment, and he was not allowed to leave the country until he was thoroughly cured. The authorities had a special reason for this course, apart from the physical welfare of the subject. Knowing the stringency of the immigration laws of America, they were aware that an emigrant suffering from trachoma would be refused admission into the country and deported back, causing expense to the sufferer and trouble to the countries concerned.

expense to the sufferer and trouble to the countries concerned. The Norddeutscher Lloyd Steamship Company, which shipped at Bremen and Hamburg most of the Continental emigrants, absolutely refused to carry any such passenger unless he could produce a certificate from the bureau showing that he was free from this particular eye disease. The reason for their strict caution was due to the fact that if the emigrant was refused admission to the country of destination the company would have to carry him back at its own expense. Mr. Brodsky said he had known Dr. Shimkin, an eminent eye specialist, to examine thousands of immigrants at Odessa on behalf of the emigration bureau, and had himself witnessed many of the examinations.

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