

REPORT OF COMMISSIONERS ON ADMINISTRATION OF CROWN LANDS OF OTAGO.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

The Commissioners appointed to inquire into and report upon the administration of the Waste Lands of the Crown in the Province of Otago, in the execution of the duties imposed upon them traversed a considerable portion of the Province, and collected a large mass of evidence upon the subjects brought by the inhabitants under their notice. They have now the honor to present to your Excellency the following Report, prefacing it with the remark, that the subject of their inquiry was so wide and multifarious—involving so many questions and grounds of complaint, real or supposed—and so many and such conflicting interests of the greatest importance to the welfare of the community,—that they were obliged to abandon the further elucidation of many points and the complete investigation of many debateable questions they had entered upon the consideration of, as to effect this would have demanded a much greater space of time than either their other public avocations or the intentions of the Government allowed them to devote to these objects. They cannot but feel, therefore, and tender apologies for, the degree to which their Report may fall short of the expectations of the numerous persons interested in the matters it has to deal with.

The complaints of mal-administration of the Land Laws were principally made by two classes of the settlers of Otago, whose circumstances, as well as the particular laws affecting them, are in many particulars very dissimilar. These classes are, first, the settlers in those parts of the Province which have been declared Hundreds; and, secondly, the inhabitants of the districts which constitute the gold fields.

I.—WANT OF LAND IN THE OLD HUNDREDS.

(a.) Sale of Land at Ten Shillings per Acre.

The complaint of settlers in these districts is, that the Provincial Government, by its acts, has deprived them of the commonage required for the feed of cattle or sheep necessary to the successful pursuit of their farming operations. The acts especially complained of are (1), the sale by Government of certain inferior portions of existing Hundreds at 10s. an acre; and (2), its entering into certain covenants with runholders adjoining the Hundreds, whereby it has been prevented extending these Hundreds or declaring new ones.

1. With respect to the sale of land at 10s. per acre, it may be premised that Sales of all land in Hundreds. “The Otago Waste Lands Act, 1866,” provided in sect. 35 that lands within any Hundred might, with the sanction of the Superintendent and Provincial Council, be sold by auction at the upset price of 10s. per acre, after such lands had remained open for selection and sale for the full period of seven years from the time of the same having been first opened for selection and sale. The Provincial Council, at its next meeting, passed a resolution to the effect that the whole of the lands remaining unsold in existing Hundreds should be put up for sale. The sales complained of were made accordingly.