

may not have been acquired by the Provincial Government from the runholder to whom they are leased, as applications are often received prior to such acquisition, in order to enable the Government to form an opinion, with some degree of certainty, as to the number of settlers wanting land, and the amount required, before expending public money in acquiring it. Still this gives no explanation at all satisfactory of such a fact as that stated by Mr. Pyke.

3. The demand of £10 deposits on each application, to provide for surveys, is Deposits required. greatly complained of. In this instance, too, it appears that the Provincial Government apply the regulation made for applications limited to one 50 acre block, to cases where two or more, up to four, are given, so that for a block of 200 acres the sum of £40 is required for survey. This certainly appears an enormous charge. The Chief Surveyor (Mr. Thomson) says the average cost of Evidence, No. 94. agricultural and mining surveys has been £7 each, and if the trigonometrical correction be included, has been £10 each; and that the cause is the diffused manner in which selections are made on the gold fields. From one shilling to three shillings per acre, he says, is the average cost of sections surveyed contiguously in large blocks. The gold mining lease surveys, perhaps, should not be included in an average with ordinary agricultural lands, as it may be supposed that the latter are naturally in more accessible and level country. But it does seem to your Commissioners that £40 for the survey of 200 acres which might be even in these cases contiguous, and most probably would be, is an enormous and unjustifiable charge for this purpose, and such a tax upon a small farmer at starting as would in many cases either be ruinous, or prevent him attempting farming at all.

The charge, however, covers the rent for the first half-year, which, at 2s. 6d. per acre (a high rent in these cases, by the way, as rural land being valued at £1 per acre, it would amount to 12½ per cent. on the value of the land), would amount to £3 2s. 6d., being £6 17s. 6d. for surveys and lease. Mr. Livingston reckons the lease at £2, leaving £4 17s. 6d. for survey alone. This would be under two shillings an acre for fifty acres. But the evil is in multiplying the charge in proportion to the multiplication of the blocks. A charge which might be reasonable for one block, becomes excessive when applied to four blocks, and monstrous when such blocks are contiguous, and might be included in one survey plan, one boundary line, and one lease.

4. Another charge seemed at first incredible to your Commissioners, though Double payments for surveys. made on oath by respectable people. It was, that in some cases the Government had not, as the Regulations required, applied the balance of the deposits towards payment of the rent, and had even, in some cases, charged and received payment for the survey twice over. On investigation of the matter in Dunedin, it appeared, however, that the charge was true, and was accounted for on the part of the Government thus:—

Prior to the 1st of April, 1867, the power of granting leases was delegated to Evidence, No. 87. the Superintendent of the Province. The Regulations then in force were those of the 11th January, 1867, under which the deposit on an application for an agricultural lease was chargeable with expense of survey, the balance to be returned to the applicant. The rent was a separate charge, payable in advance from the date of the lease. Under these Regulations many applications had been received, and the survey expenses charged and paid. Why the leases in these cases were not issued does not appear in evidence; but a new Superintendent having been elected, the delegation to him was refused, and a General Government Agent was appointed, who issued occupation licenses in the interim. The Superintendent or Provincial Government, however, refused to deliver up the gold-fields documents to the Agent. The leases were kept in abeyance until some months after the General Assembly had met and passed a special Act authorizing delegation to the Provincial Executive, who, on the 14th February, 1868, issued new Regulations on the subject. Under these the survey expenses were made chargeable upon rents to be paid from the date of a certificate issued on approval of an application, to operate till the lease was ready for issue; and the deposit paid on application was to be returned. When the leases in the applications under the old regulations came to be issued, the