

Receiver of Land Revenue thought himself bound by the new Regulations to demand the full half-year's rent, but instructed the District Receivers to deduct the amount previously paid for surveys, but to give receipts, not for the full half-year's rent, but only for the balance paid, till he received instructions as to the matter from head-quarters. In some cases, the Receiver admits that the full rent may have been demanded and paid, including survey charges which had been already paid under the old Regulations,—a mistake he attributes to his not having the account books in his possession (he being an officer of the General Government), and only having access to them by permission of the Provincial Government. Thus the unfortunate applicants for leases were kept a year or more out of leases which might have been given at any time, and then, in several instances, were made to pay survey charges twice over.

Evidence, No. 38. A minor evil connected with these leases was complained of in the Dunstan District, viz., that applicants for agricultural leases had to go from Cromwell and other places as far as Roxburgh—thirty-eight miles down the Clutha—to put in their applications. This could be easily remedied by authorizing the Warden, Mr. Pyke, to receive them.

#### V.—ALLEGED FAVOURITISM IN SALE OF CROWN LANDS.

Evidence, No. 4. A complaint was made by a settler at Tuapeka—a successful gold-miner, and a highly respectable man—of the manner he had been dealt with by the Government or Land Office in the matter of an attempt to purchase a block of land some years back in a neighbouring district. He applied for 6,000 acres at Pomahaka, which were advertised for sale three months. Meantime, having visited the district, he found a block of much better land in the same district, so did not attend the sale of the first, which fetched at auction 35s. an acre. He then went to the office to buy the second and superior block, and found it had been sold at £1 an acre, without any notice, to a draper resident in the town. He was prepared to give from £2 to £3 an acre for the land. He says that Mr. Hughes, who acted as a sort of unpaid agent, allowed, at a public meeting at the election of the Superintendent, that the Province lost about £8,000 by this transaction. On investigation, it appeared that the sale had been perfectly in accordance with the law, which permitted land to be sold at the fixed price of £1 an acre to the first applicant, going to auction only in case of simultaneous applications. This seems to have been simply an instance of the working of a bad Land-law, which enabled a speculator to anticipate the purchase of a *bonâ fide* agricultural settler, although the principle of selling land to the first applicant at fixed prices was adopted and has always been defended, on the ground that it was the best precaution against this very abuse.

Evidence, No. 85  
and No. 100.

#### VI.—OAMARU RESERVES, &C.

Sale of stone quarry reserves. At Oamaru, several complaints were brought before the Commissioners. One was the sale, by the Provincial Government, of certain blocks of land reserved for the public, on account of the famous building stone of the district cropping out upon their surface. Several of these reserves had been made, but all of them had been put up for sale—some, perhaps, at 30s. an acre; whilst the owners of some of them charge from 3d. to 6d. a cubic foot royalty for the stone. The Members of the Town Council grievously complained of being deprived of the free and gratuitous supply of this stone for their public edifices, which otherwise they would have the benefit of. That their complaints were sincere, is proved by the fact that the Mayor of the town had actually paid, on behalf of the Council, a sum of

Evidence, No. 78.

£698 7s. 6d. for one of these sections which they could not prevent the sale of. The explanation given of this alleged disregard of the public interests of the inhabitants of Oamaru by the Provincial Government was, that their experience had shown them that reserves of building stone were of very little advantage; that contractors for public buildings made very little difference in the amount of their tenders on account of the stone required being obtainable gratis from public quarries; that where they took advantage of them they generally quarried the stone in such a slovenly and careless manner as to render the quarry almost useless for those who came after them; and that the expense of such