

No. 1.
Mr. Mount.
Continued.

13. Do you think assessments under the Hundred system are, and will be, generally paid up? Under the Hundred system, I think it will not be satisfactorily collected until a special officer is appointed and the 111th Section of the Act altered, which requires that the assessments shall be appropriated under the direction of the Wardens. But, with respect to the collection of assessments levied under the Goldfields Regulations, made under the Goldfields Act, they have been collected since the Government took proper measures by the appointment of a special officer for that purpose.

14. Under the Goldfields Regulations how is the Assessment Fund appropriated?—It goes to the Provincial Revenue.

15. Taking the Otago Land Law as it is, was not the arrangement made by the Provincial Executive with respect to the covenants, as advantageous a one as could be made under the existing circumstances? I was Provincial Secretary, and a party to it. The Act was hurriedly administered during the elections. Mr. Dick was anxious to administer the Act as liberally as he could. Nothing was done without the advice of the leading counsel in Dunedin as to what was possible, in a liberal direction—that is, he had Mr. Prendergast's, Mr. Cook's, Mr. James Smith's, as well as the Provincial Solicitor's, advice and that of others. There was a series of questions submitted for legal advice as to what power the Superintendent had to refuse leases, and the opinions were generally unfavorable. Mr. Smith said he could scarcely have power to refuse what he had never been authorised to grant.

16. Had the Government received any petition or been otherwise requested to open up land for settlement? And had any promises been made in that particular?—At the time I came into office it was a grievance of old standing. I believe promises had been made to the inhabitants of the Teviot and other outlying districts, that land should be opened up, and some blocks were surveyed for the purpose, but were found to be unsuitable. It was difficult to get satisfactory information from competent individuals as to the character of lands, and local interests often interfered. The Government knew of the requirements, and the covenants were made to meet them.

17. Would it have been better, do you think *now*, to have taken the whole of some Runs near the centres of population on the Goldfields, instead of securing under the covenants for the future these Blocks scattered throughout the Province?—I am inclined to think it would, generally. There is one other point I would remark upon: I am quite sure that the Government have been unfortunate in their arbitrations as to compensation for Runs. I attribute that to the Arbitrators never having gone upon the Runs, and taken evidence upon the spot. As one instance, I would point out Mr. Cargill and Anderson got five shillings an acre for land not worth half as much as land that Mr. Smith gave up willingly (that near Tuapeka) at 2s. 6d. per acre without arbitration.

18. It is not a defect in the covenant arrangement that the unsold portions of the Blocks to be taken are not left as commonage for the purchasers within the Blocks, but to the original runholder for pasturage, until all is sold?—That is a very great defect, tantamount to rendering the arrangement useless; but that is a defect in the *Law*, and not in the administration of it.

19. Are actual diggers concerned in this agitation for land?—Unquestionably they are. The occupants of the Tuapeka Agricultural Reserve have, fully two-thirds of them, been actual miners. But mixed with them are storekeepers, butchers, and others; but most of them have been actual miners. There are claimholders now, who work their claims, who are agitating for land.

20. Is there any limitation upon the amount of stock, occupants may run on the Agricultural Reserve at Tuapeka?—There is no limitation. There have been several applications refused for sheep, because there is not pasturage for them.

21. Is there any other point you would notice?—I wish to bring under the notice of the Commissioners, that the Provincial Government have inserted in the Agricultural Leases a covenant on the part of the lessee, requiring him to provide a substantial fence round the whole of the land leased. The system is burdensome at present, the area of land too limited, and any additional burden would tend to check settlement.

No. 2.

Mr. Shadwell Keen, being duly sworn, said:—

My evidence relates to the effect of the present Land Administration upon the population of this district. In this I include not only Tuapeka, but the up-country district Mount Benger, where I lived, and in which I have had considerable experience. The interests and wants of the two places are identical. The amount of land available for agricultural settlement and for pastoral purposes (referring to the population—outside Runs) is quite inadequate to the requirements of the present population. It is within my knowledge, that within the last three or four years, this inadequacy has led to persons possessed of capital leaving the district, and to the general want of prosperity with those that are settled upon the land. I have also found that persons residing here have dissuaded their friends at home from coming here, in consequence of a sufficient quantity of land not being available for settlement; and I am of opinion that a most desirable class of colonists have thus been kept out of the Province. I know, also, cases in which persons have come out upon the representation of friends unacquainted with the actual state of affairs, being employed in pursuits, and who have been grievously disappointed upon arriving here. These cases have come under my own personal observation. It is not mere opinion, but actual matter of fact. Referring to the holders of Agricultural Leases, their general cause of complaint is, that upon a very small portion of ground they are compelled to expend all their

No. 2.
Mr. Keen.
20th Feb., 1869.