

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 4TH MARCH, 1879.

Mr. JOHN MURDOCH sworn and examined.

With regard to the matters of the settlement generally I have to complain of the manner in which the work was allotted. We were to have had three days' work per week, but during the first twelve months we only got one-half of the work we were entitled to, and were kept constantly in debt. During the second year I had rather more than I was entitled to. The reason given the first year was that there were others who required work, and that there was not work enough to give to all. I am not aware of any reason why all should not have been employed. In the third year I did not get my three days' work per week. The greater part of my papers relating to this are at Jackson's Bay. I am leaving the settlement. I had one allotment allotted to me, and I have purchased the right to four others. The rent of each allotment was £3 per annum. I acquired my right by paying up the accrued rents. I have received my accounts from Mr. Macfarlane. I got work on an average of about one day and a half per week during the time I was there. I cannot speak accurately without the books and vouchers which I have at Jackson's Bay. There was a great deal of bad weather, but I could have worked more than double the time if work had been allotted to me. One of the reasons given by Mr. Macfarlane for not employing me was that he must employ those most indebted. Then the price of provisions was 25 per cent. higher than we could have obtained them for. I could myself supply flour for 12s. when it was 16s. at the Government store, and for 16s. when it was £1, by obtaining it by the "Maori," from Dunedin. On one occasion I got information from Mr. Driver on the subject. Payments were not made to the settlers in cash. Mr. Macfarlane would only give orders payable on the Government store. Many settlers, who could not draw their money due in cash, left the settlement to sue for the money. If the settlers demanded payment of their wages in cash they got no more work. After the 1st March, 1875, I did not receive any payment by cash from Mr. Macfarlane. John Love was stopped work for asking for money. Porter and De Montalk had stores in a small way; they sold stores at 25 per cent. less than Government price. Beef was offered by myself at 6d. and 7d., while it was 8d. at the Government store. Several settlers asked me in May, 1876, to ask Mr. Macfarlane to allow me to supply meat for money-orders drawn by himself; he replied, "I shall allow no meat to be supplied, except through the Government store." I only supplied one beast, which was injured, and one I sold alive to Mr. Macfarlane. Mr. Macfarlane gave as a reason that he was afraid of the settlers getting into debt. My proposal was to supply meat on Mr. Macfarlane's order at 6d. and 7d. per lb. I did not know whether the work was done for the orders or not. I know of one case where Mr. Macfarlane owed £6 to one settler, and refused to pay him; his name was William John Wheeler. I think Charles Robinson was the butcher at the Government store, and Love also. Wheeler is now at Jackson's Bay, and Courtenay at Lake Wanaka. With respect to contracts I was offered eight chains of clearing in No. 2 cross road, at 35s. per chain, by Mr. Macfarlane, but the specification was so rigid that I could not earn more than 4s. per day, and I refused it. Ray, Moth, and Birch took it under a modified specification, and I had no chance of getting it. Eleven large trees less were grubbed under the modified specification. The price was raised by 2s. 6d. per chain. I was told if I refused the work I should get no more. Ray is in Taranaki, Moth in Kumara, and Birch is dead. When I was refused the other work I asked for sawing, but was refused, though 5,000 feet of timber was ordered from Hokitika. In November I got a job of sawing. Afterwards, in December, 1877, I tendered for road formation near the cemetery, at £6 per chain. I was informed by the Resident Agent that my tender was accepted, and that I could sign the contract any time. I offered to sign the contract at once, but was told that duplicates had to be made out for several offices. I cut some of the timber, and agreed with Mr. Macfarlane to start the work on Monday; but on the previous Saturday I received a note, saying there was some mistake with regard to the use of some plant promised. [Letter handed in.] I went to see him, and he told me he had shifted the pegs, thus altering the amount of work required to be done. I asked what would be the allowance for the extra work? He said, "I shall allow you nothing." I said I would carry out the contract as per specification, or do the extras for the sum of £2. He informed that I should not put a pick in it until I signed the contract, and nothing would be allowed for extras. I was not allowed to do the work, which was done by day-labour. [Witness here handed in a letter from Mr. Patten.] I assert that the reports made to the Government contained statements which were not true. The report relates to a clause of a petition sent in with reference to cash payments (No. 10, D.-6., 1878). [Witness here handed in letter from Mr. Macfarlane.] After the beginning of 1878 the settlers were paid in cash. We found that orders sent to Hokitika lay there a long time before they were paid. In one instance this caused an expense of 16s. on £25, for telegrams and other expenses. Orders were given on the Officer in Charge at Hokitika. Some of these were left with the Hon. Mr. Bonar; others I have sent to Dunedin, and received complaints of delay in payment. For the orders on Mr. Patten I sometimes got bank cheques in exchange; sometimes notes. The cheques were not made out for the exact amounts always, and the settlers wished to have their labour paid for in cash. In either January or February, 1878, there was a sum of £2 4s. coming to me. I received a cheque for a different sum than that which I was entitled to. I did not receive the cheque numbered in the voucher, but I received all that was due to me. I never asked Mr. Macfarlane why the cheques were not made out for the exact amounts. Mr. Macfarlane said, in his report, that there was plenty of cash for transacting the business of the settlement, and this statement I deny. At the time of cutting the timber I signed for £8, and only received £6. John